



using space ten
june 2016

**VIVA
POORT
GEBOUW**



Poortgebouw soon after being squatted



Poortgebouw from a similar angle more recently with the Deloitte tower and yuppie flats now behind it

Another problem is that trucks on the road which goes through the Poort quite frequently hit the underside of the building. This has been a perennial problem, which must be incredibly bad for the structure. In 1988, the Poort actually welded the warning booms of the bridge shut, so as to protest the problem.

Unfortunately, it is clear that as long as the Poortgebouw rents the building, it is possible that the owner will try to kick them out. If only they had been able to buy the building from the city before it was sold to DGG. The problem now is that DGG does not want to sell it to them and if even if they did, the price would be super-expensive. The courtcase made by the Poortgebouw against the owner for not following their contractual obligations to repair the outside of the building rumbles on.

However, despite the doom and gloom, the important thing is that the Poort is still there and doing its thing. I really like going there for the cafe sometimes, or checking a noise gig, or seeing an experimental film. Over the years, I've organised a 9/11 film night and a trashfest. The 2016 Squatting Europe Kollektive meeting was great!

The Poortgebouw has occupied an important role in the alternative culture of Rotterdam and continues to do so. I hope the fresh energy of the new living group continues for many years into the future...²⁸



"Rotterdam Council threatens the Poortgebouw. No eviction. Eviction = War"

28 Still to be added: Women only attic / Broedplaats / Interviews / Fotos from now / Plus more ++++++

the Poort and also their lawyer.²⁶

In any case, the higher court eventually threw out the eviction courtcase.

IS THIS THE END?

But is it over? Is the Poort now safe?

It is not 100% secure by any means... The Poort is clearly prime real estate and there are still courtcases ongoing, in which the residents are trying to get DGG to honour their contractual commitments regarding the maintenance of the outside of the building.

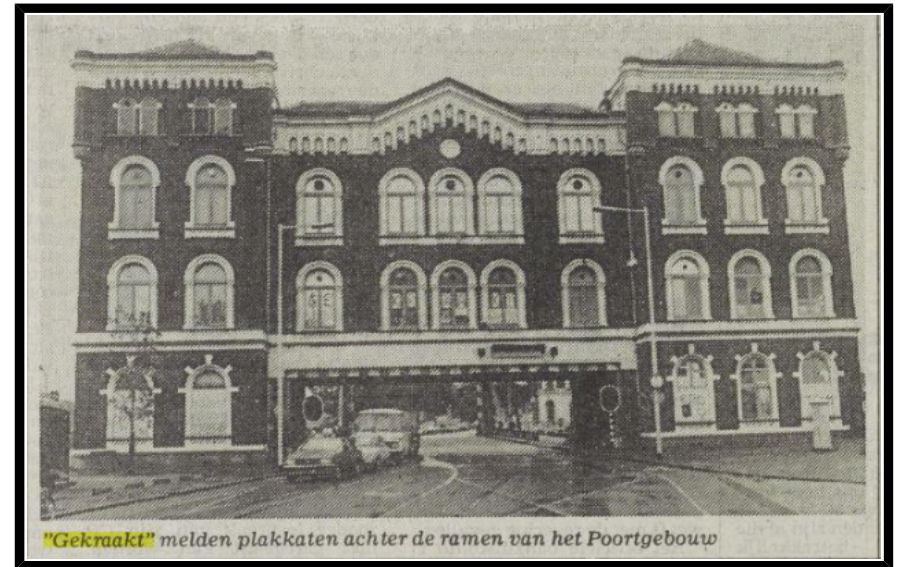
There are other problems too. The hydraulic opening mechanism for the bridge was upgraded in the 1990s. The city did not predict any problems regarding the structural integrity of the Poort but now every time the bridge opens, the building shakes. This will be an expensive problem to resolve, but it's obvious that the root cause is the city shirking its obligations to maintain buildings affected by municipal works.



A workman opening up the boom again (front door of Poort can be seen behind)²⁷

²⁶ http://poortgebouw.nl/galleries/press/05082_nrc.html

²⁷ "Bewoners Poortgebouw lassen slagbomen vast". "Het vrije volk : democratisch-socialistisch dagblad". Rotterdam, 08-11-1988.



Poortgebouw soon after being occupied

(Caption reads: "Squatted" say the poster behind the windows of the Poortgebouw')

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Note this is a work in progress and a rushed version1,

published for the Waiting Room event at the Poortgebouw July 1-2, 2016

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INTRODUCTION

Het Poortgebouw (literally 'the gatehouse') is a monumental building in Kop van Zuid, spanning a road on the south side of the river which splits Rotterdam in two. It is bound to feature in any account of the city's underground counterculture (and is written about in usingspace1!). The building was squatted in 1980 and legalised four years later. Unlike many projects from this time, the Poort holds on to a radical identity, still hosting a weekly cafe and providing space for experimental and non-funded events. Currently, thirty people live there in a housing co-operative. There's lots to be said about it, indeed even the building itself has an interesting history, so I'll give a short rundown about that first before moving on to its squatted times, then ending up in the current day

SOME INITIAL HISTORY

“Port baron,” politician and businessman Lodewijk Pincoffs had the building built in 1879 as headquarters for his company (Rotterdamsche Handelsvereniging) but fled the country before it was finished, running off to America to escape his obscenely huge debts (20 million guilders). The Poort stands at the entrance to the Binnenhaven, which used to be a working harbour. A second Poortgebouw building was planned for the other side of the bridge, built in scaled down version following the scandal and eventually demolished in 1937. The Poort was briefly used as a nunnery in the 1920s, before becoming the head office of Havenbedrijf Rotterdam (Port Authority Rotterdam) in 1932.

At the beginning of World War II when the Nazis invaded the Netherlands and made a surprise invasion of Rotterdam, there was bitter fighting in the centre, indeed there is a photograph of a German soldier lying on the roof of the Poort and firing across the water. The next day came the firebombing of the city centre which forced the Dutch to surrender (Utrecht was next to be destroyed). The Poort was lucky to survive the bombardment, being on the south side of the river, whereas the firestorm in the centre on the northside burnt almost everything. Later on in the war, Jewish people were hidden in the building.

almost free.²⁴ That's an interesting statement since in this time the rent was something like 210 euros per person, including electricity/water/gas. Thirty people lived at the Poort so that's over 6,000 euros every month, quite a tidy sum. If social rent was used for maintenance instead of lining people's pockets, the Poort would look much better from the outside now.

The Poort started a petition and on their website said in 2004 that it might be the last party. But things rumbled on, eventually ending up in a long-running courtcase. At first the Poort lost, but they appealed and then won! This was largely due to the persistent efforts of just a few people living at the Poort, who with the help of a support group managed to keep DGG's greedy hands off the building. All the way through the long struggle, it was clear that it was hard for people to take on the arguments regarding freespaces and community living, but in the end this worked in favour of the Poort, since it was rather hard for the DGG to find other buildings to which the whole living group could move.

Of course as with any courtcase, games were being played by both sides. The Poort did a good job of both carrying on with its own activities to show its worth as a freespace and reaching out for support. In 2005 the residents marched to City Hall and presented their case. There was also a petition for supporters. Political parties such as SP and PvdA said they were supportive and the councilman Pastors pledged to write a letter of support from the council to DGG. This eventually happened, but then he declined to help further, saying that the Poort was supposed to have handed over a list of the inhabitants and had not done that, using this flimsy excuse as a way to drop the issue. Subsequently there was an article reporting this in the Rotterdams Dagblad, to which the Poort replied as follows:

Depastorize Rotterdam in 2006

A clear indication that the writers and the editors of the Rotterdams Dagblad are not required to have actually read what has already been written in their own paper about a particular story (and recently). It is a mere regurgitation of (dis-)information which the right-wing city councillor [Pastors] wants to publicize as his “help” a few weeks after writing to the Woning Bedrijf Rotterdam. In response to the accusation that we are not actively searching for a replacement location for our 25 year Poortgebouw living group ourselves: of course not! That is the responsibility of the owners and since the date of the sale, we have never been offered a replacement location (vervangende huisvesting) for our living group. Not to mention, that is the reason why Pastors wrote the letter to the WBR in the first place which, to this date (Aug. 23, 2005), has not produced any alternatives.²⁵

In the article the Poort is replying to, they were referred to as a 'krakersgroep' (squatters group), which could only serve to diminish their standing in the eyes of many. This mistake was also repeated in an NRC article, which drew a response from

24 <http://www.poortgebouw.nl/galleries/press/041113dagblad/dagblad.html>

25 http://poortgebouw.nl/galleries/press/050630_rdamdag.html

presumably a better fit with all the new buildings which had now sprung up around the Poort. Once full of derelict warehouses in the 1970s, the Kop van Zuid area now has office buildings for Deloitte Touche and KPN, plus the city courts. The Nieuwe Luxor theatre, the Nederlands Foto Museum, the new Lantaren Venster cinema were all plonked down here instead of remaining in the centre. Skyscrapers for expensive living keep popping up.

The Poort pledged to resist any attempt to move them on. As someone living there said in 2002:

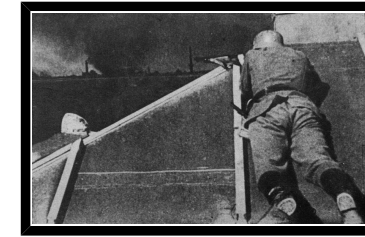
*From computer programmer to construction worker, from student to unemployed, everyone is living here. You can be yourself here without someone looking at you curiously. We ate organic years before the Netherlands found that interesting. Theatre, arts, politics or social issues, everyone keeps busy with something here. Nobody is judged to be strange.*²²

DGG refused to name the price they had paid, but it seems the city had sold the Poortgebouw for between 250,000 or 450,000 euros (accounts differ), a really low price for such a large building. For the price of one luxury apartment, a price which most likely the residents could have afforded with a Triodos mortgage had they only known about the sale, the city had washed its hands of a living group which didn't fit to its vision. Of course things went downhill from this point. The struggle kicked off when DGG announced in 2004 that the rent would be stopped on February 1 2005. As a representative of the Poort commented, "The inhabitants of the Poortgebouw apparently don't fit any more in this area. But they were the first people living in this now trendy renovated harbour zone!"²³

And so the long battle had begun. Martien de Groene, director of the developers (and thus nothing to do with being green) said they were eager to repair the building, even though they should already have been doing that as per the contract, which stated that the inhabitants would look after inside the building and the owner would take care of the outside. Residents of the Poort said they weren't leaving without a fight after almost twenty years and that DGG was offering them individual housing but they were a living group and wanted to live together.

The story as it develops is complex with lots of twists and turns but at root it's quite simple. The Poortgebouw has always had to fight for its survival since it is the odd one out and clearly greedy capitalists see the money which could be rinsed from the building. Who has the right to the city? The rich or everyone?

De Groene Groep declared that the Poortgebouw was in breach of contract because they had a twice weekly cafe on wednesdays and sundays. The Poort retorted that this was a social meeting point for people of the house and their friends, with no commercial angle. Martien de Groene said that the inhabitants of the Poort lived there



Nazi soldier on roof of Poortgebouw shooting across river¹

After WWII the building was still used by the Port Authority, which moved out in 1977, leaving the building to stand empty for three years. The city council wanted to turn it into an "eros centrum", the plan being to clean up nearby Katendrecht by moving all the sex workers from there into one building. Unsurprisingly this was an unpopular topdown proposal, so when the building was occupied in 1980 there was lots of local support.

Also as a sidenote in 1984, the Poort became a national monument. The commissioners said it was a heritage building because of its important role in the changing nature of trade and the harbour and also pointed to its "characteristic architecture, which freely borrows from different architectural styles of the past (particularly the round "Romanesque" arches)."²

SQUATTED

As part of a national action day with the title "wij jongeren eisen" ('we the youth demand'), a large group of people squatted the Poort. The pictures below show the action:



The actual squat! (Front door on left)³

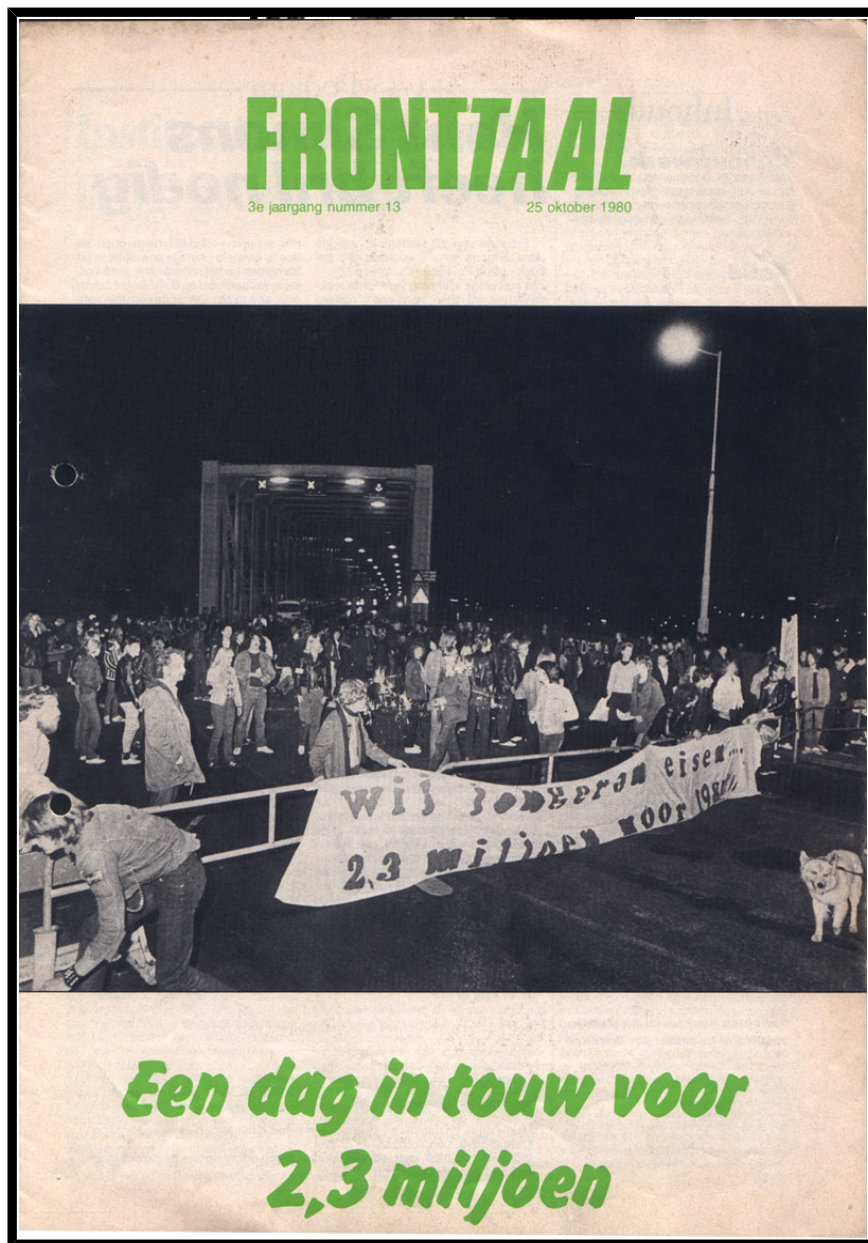
²² Wij gaan hier niet zomaar weg Rotterdams Dagblad 31/1/2002

²³ Bewoners Poortgebouw moeten wijken voor kantoren Maasstad 8/9/2004

¹ http://www.vansandick.com/image/map/nl/rotterdam/194005_Duitse_soldaat_op_Poortgebouw.jpg

² "Witte villa's worden monument". "Het vrije volk : democratisch-socialistisch dagblad". Rotterdam, 29-09-1984.
<http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010961833:mpeg21:a0412>

³ Stadsarchief <http://poortgebouw.nl/overPG/kraak.html>



Front cover of Frontaal magazine, 1980⁴

4 Frontaal 1980

BANNER ISSUES

So did the regeneration of the neighbourhood lead to problems? Naturally it did.

There was also a small scandal in 2003, when the Poort put up a banner protesting against the Iraq war. They soon got two cops at the door telling them to take it down on the orders of the the Mayor (Ivo Opstelten, now a disgraced politician). At first they complied, but then realised there was no legal justification for taking down a banner, so they put it back up and called the media.



It seems that it was unhappy neighbours complaining who had lit the fire surrounding the banner. As someone said in a 2004 interview with the squatzone Trammelant:

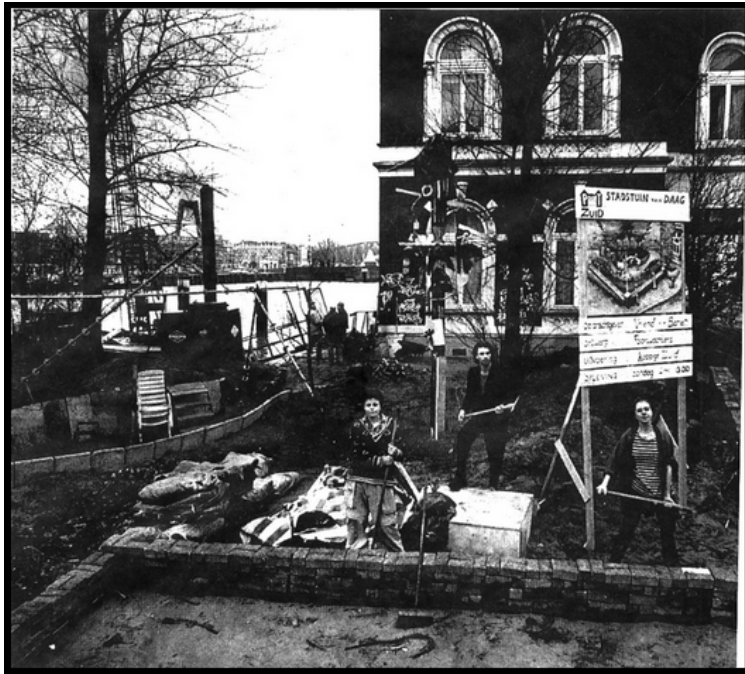
They see people so drunk at our front door and it's dark and there's a smell of piss; that's their impression of the whole house. It's like in the whole society. It is a sign of the time that they rather call someone on top instead of going to the problem themselves.²¹

However, in this time some better links were made with the new neighbours, which resulted in the Poort agreeing to monitor noise levels and only play live music until midnight. Also in 2007, a Queen's Day celebration was organised on the riverside beside the Poort, with residents playing music and integrating with other locals.

OWNERSHIP DRAMA

Despite the the longevity of the Poort and the fact it was paying rent, it was still under threat in the 2000s. In 2001, without telling the inhabitants the city sold the Poort to De Groene Groep (DGG), a private development firm supposed to be specialised in the maintenance of monumental buildings. Unfortunately what quickly transpired was that DGG simply wanted to evict the buiding and turn it into offices,

21 Trammelant Interview with members of the Poortgebouw May 2004
<http://poortgebouw.nl/news/trammelantINT.html>



In 1997, there's a picture showing a totem pole and a board set up by the Poort to show their alternative plan for the garden.¹⁹ The local council wanted to tear it up whilst repairing the riverside wall and whilst they did succeed eventually, it didn't happen without a struggle. They wanted to evict the garden on March 3, so the Poort chose to put on an open day on that date. They also took the city to court over the plan to cut down the trees. Yet another Poortgebouw resident said:

*The whole of Kop van Zuid is covered in concrete in 1997. We present courageous resistance to the developers. With the opening of the city garden we are letting the city of Rotterdam and local people decide if they want these trees and the artwork to remain or if the bulldozers will flatten the garden.*²⁰

Nowadays, the garden is gone but some of the old trees remain. Also the Poort still has a tiny garden next to the river, so there is still some breathing space. It's a lovely space to sit and watch the sun set behind the houses on the Noordereiland.

¹⁹ "Totempaal" illustreert verzet' Rotterdams Dagblad 01/03/1997

²⁰ "Totempaal" illustreert verzet' Rotterdams Dagblad 01/03/1997

Over the years the Poort has hosted an immense number of events, some of which are listed on their website.⁵ We are talking theatre, experimental music, tekno parties, hip hop, punk, hardcore, talks, workshops, festivals and so on. See the flyers on the middle pages for just a few examples, there's also a wall full of posters in the cafe. The cafe itself has been going on and off since pretty much the beginning, serving up cheap food to residents and friends. It's interesting to note that for much of the 1980s it was an organic kitchen, way before that was trendy. At certain points there has been an anarchist infoshop and for some time there was a squatters advice hour (KSU).

I've always thought that for me it would be challenging to live in a group of 30 people in one building, my nearest experience would be living on a terrain which had 10 buildings and 20 people, were we used to joke about terrible it would be if we were all crammed into one building. So for me a garden would help and it was fascinating to see that actually there was a garden to begin with, more on that below, after a discussion of the Poortgebouw and politics.

From my perspective as a visitor, the Poort always seems to be up and down in terms of energy, a situation perhaps created by the internal architecture with different groups living on different floors with their own kitchens. I'm happy to say that currently in 2016 there is an amazing bunch of people living there. Some are new recruits, others have been there a while and there is a real fresh warm breeze blowing through the corridors, although it's not like I've met all the 30 people living there. In the mid-2000s when I first visited it seemed rather different from my outside perspective, people from the house joked about the venue being a "losers club" which no-one went to, the communal food buying had ground to a halt, people from the house didn't ever go to the cafe (the reasons for this would make a zine on its own!) and there seemed to be a lot of ghosts living there because the rent was cheap, rather than because they wanted to be involved with a radical leftwing housing project with a strong tradition of being a space for alternative movement. Back then it did get better as newer more activisty people moved in (leading to my up/down theory).

The Poort has been around so long that it has its own rumour mill attached to it. Some squatters don't go there because of conflicts which should have burnt out long ago, no-one seems to know its current legal status, some friends refuse to cycle to zuid (wtf). Generations have passed, so everyone knows the Poort from a different time. Currently, the website is hardly updated and most promotion takes place on facebook, so nonfacebook users may find it hard to hear what's going on. It took me a few months to work it out! At time of writing the cafe is on summer pauze but is normally every Wednesday (not Sunday anymore).

As well as feeding back my research so I don't feel like I'm hanging out in archives just to avoid the cruel world, one good reason to make this zine is to try to keep some (positive) stories about the Poort floating around, as a spur for future action. She who controls the past controls the future!

⁵ Poortgebouw.nl

Personally, I think a lot of the rumours and disinformation come from miscommunications and laziness on behalf of both residents and people looking in from the outside. It seems to be that as projects age, they institutionalise at least in some ways and thus new generations do not like the older more established projects. Perhaps it was hard to maintain energy levels during the long courtcase, to be discussed further below.

I was involved with a social centre in the UK founded by squatters and environmental activists, where the crusty punks didn't really like to go there because they couldn't sit with their dogs in the cafe or bring in their own booze. These complaints didn't really bother me since they are the rules pretty much anywhere and it's annoying to have dogs fighting or to hear the bar is almost bankrupt whilst people sit in the garden getting drunk on their own supply. I also occasionally had people telling me that activists were pocketing the profits from the centre... first of all what profits and secondly the centre was emphatic about everyone involved giving their work as a volunteer, in fact that was sort of the point of the centre in a nutshell, being a self-organised autonomous project. So it seems inevitable that people will end up hating projects over time, even if they actually have a lot of political affiliations to them, and there simply isn't much to be done about that.

Kind of related to this, it was superinteresting to find a report from NN (Nomen Nescio - an alternative magazine coming from the squatters movement) about an incident at the Poort in 1989. It's worth putting translation of the communique in full below:

POORTGEBOUW RESQUATTED

ROTTERDAM - On October 27 1989: At 6am the residents of the Poortgebouw in Rotterdam were literally and figuratively awakened. A group of residents was fed up with the ignored problems in the house.

Lights and alarms were turned on and wearing overalls and balaclavas the action group stormed through the house, waking everyone up and providing an explanatory leaflet. Via a megaphone it was made clear that this was not a police raid.

The sleepy residents reacted differently. Some locked the corridor doors, others selfishly kept their own doors closed. The action ended up in discussions in the large communal kitchen. This discussion was one of the most important things the action provoked.

In the nine years since the squat there a lot has happened. The property was legalized in 1982 and has slowly lost its political character. This means that amongst other things that the Poortgebouw [PG] is never or almost never involved in political actions and that the PG itself plays no more an active role. The result is that prospective residents come to the PG NOT because it is a place with a political nature, but because it provides an inexpensive way of living.

THE LOST GARDEN



As an indication of how the area has changed we can return to the topic of the Poortgebouw's garden. This was on the westside of the riverfront and seems to have been claimed by the Poort following the squat action. Probably no-one cared about this until the area was regenerated in the 1990s and yuppy apartments were built right opposite the Poort. From 1993 onwards, the Poort was forced to fight plans to evict the garden and to take away the trees along the riverside. As a resident said sarcastically "It's supernice to chop down healthy trees for a yuppy project. They want to put little seats and walls here."¹⁷ In a different newspaper article about the battle, another Poortgebouwer commented "don't chop down trees to make a uniform line of blades of grass all in a row."¹⁸

¹⁷Bewoners Poortgebouw in actie voor behoud bomen' Rotterdams Dagblad 19/08/1996

¹⁸'Kaapvergunning twaalf bomen bij het Poortgebouw aangehouden' 3/08/1996 Rotterdams Dagblad

One of them said “I put the bomb to protest against the evictions in Amsterdam and the police raids in Ameliswaard.”¹⁵ In Amsterdam, the Lucky Luijk had been evicted, leading to riots there and in Nijmegen the cops had fired warning shots and guarded their precious station all night long.

Some people from the squatters movement did complain to a newspaper (Het Vrije Volk) that normally when someone is arrested only their initials and town of residence are given, but not their actual address. Further, they said it fitted to a general treatment of squatters in the media as troublemakers, hooligans and terrorists, driving a wedge between squatters and the rest of society. The response of the editors is funny, they say “There is a difference between people who squat a home and people who use bicycle chains and rip up the street. It is in the interest of the squatters themselves if they discriminate: For rioters are rioters.”¹⁶

I haven't been able to find anything about whether the arrestees were eventually convicted or not.



The Poort attic in 1980

15 "Bom bij politiebureau 'Amsterdam' werkt door in het land". *Het vrije volk : democratisch-socialistisch dagblad*. Rotterdam, 13-10-1982. <http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010961199:mpeg21:a0116>

16 "Kraakbeweging". *Het vrije volk : democratisch-socialistisch dagblad*. Rotterdam, 16-10-1982. <http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010961202:mpeg21:a0248>

The purpose of this action was therefore (among other things through discussion) to recover the property for the radical anarchist and feminist movement. The action was titled 'resquat' to draw attention to the previously squatted nature and the consequences of renting.

In order to pay the rent to the GWR (gemeentelijk woningbedrijf Rotterdam - municipal housing company Rotterdam), we are forced to fill empty rooms with people we would not accept in a squat. Renting also means that people who work (and thus earn more and can pay more rent) could consider compensating for their lack of time with respect to the (self-managed) house by paying more. There is another ethics in workers and students compared to people who have no job and/or refuse to work (no solidarity or even a low discretion).

The action was playful, but had a serious objective. The PG must again become involved with the political struggle. We want to start a radical bloc within the PG. Perhaps a broader Rotterdam platform, video evenings, discussions etc (the function of the bar under construction). This is particularly important in the context of city regeneration for us (and around us?). Soon the PG will be the only freespace in the Kop van Zuid.

Other places planning to legalize should be warned of the danger of depoliticization.

Other already legalized buildings as Tetterode in Amsterdam also have to deal with these problems. Exchange of experience might well become important.

The PG still stands open for action. The place can still be used. As a base for meetings, parties and suchlike with a political function. The PG must and will attract new residents with anarchist and feminist leanings.

THE ONLY SOLUTION IS AN INSIDE REVOLUTION.

*PVP (Politieke Vleugel Poortgebouw), Stieltjesstraat 38, 3071 JX Rotterdam.*⁶

So it appears that even as early as 1989 the Poort was dealing with issues of institutionalisation. It's a fascinating discussion, for me it's superimportant for places won through squatting to maintain a radical identity and to remember the movements which produced them. Yet some things really date this communique – for example the suggestion for those who earn more to pay more rent isn't heard much nowadays, in the movement or anywhere else. Also, the reference to the Poort as soon to be the only freespace in Kop van Zuid seems kind of funny, after the massive regeneration of the area in the 1990s and 2000s. Whilst warehouses on the Wilhelminapier used to be squatted, there was the Parel van Zuid nearby and even Hotel New York was occupied for a time (and saved from demolition!), it now seems extremely unlikely that a new freespace could be squatted and persist in this area, even if all these yuppie flats and offices are the slums of the future. Villa van Waning was evicted a few years ago and still stands empty despite being monumental (see usingspace9).

⁶ NN magazine 44 16/11/1989 Poortgebouw Herkraakt <http://www.ravagedigitaal.org/1989/44/10.htm>

DIGRESSION

It's also funny that the PVP communique mentions Tetterode, which was huge building squatted on 17 October 1981 in protest against the Amsterdam regeneration plans (the intention was to demolish it and build luxury apartments). The beautiful complex with entrances on the Costakade and Bilderdijkstraat in the west of the city was built between 1940 and 1947. The story of Tetterode is told in a book released in 1992 and published by De Balie, Stuurgroep Experimenten Volkshuisvesting (SEV) and Woningbouwvereniging Het Oosten.⁷ Would be great to see a book like that with lots of photos all about the Poortgebouw!



Flyer made by Tetterode soon after being squatted: "Tetterode – No parking garage, offices, big companies or unaffordable housing but neighbourhood concerns and affordable housing. Do you also have ideas? Then make contact with the people living at Tetterode"

⁷ Peter Sep 'Tetterode complex: Van kraakaffaire tot volkshuisvestingsmodel'

After staying barricaded in the building for some time, the squatters had also gone on a bit of a charm offensive, showing journalists around and making the case that they wanted to convert the former offices into living accommodation, but as a living group not as individual renters.¹²

But perhaps the council was right to be worried, the early 1980s were exciting times...

In March 1982, the police raided the Poort to seize a pirate radio transmitter.¹³ This was Radio Oranje, which had been broadcasting since mid-1981. They burst in with 40 cops, searched the entire house and took photographs. The radio did some benefit parties for a new transmitter.

In another incident, three people, two of whom apparently lived at the Poort attacked the central police station with an improvised gas canister bombs. They caused a bit of damage to the front of the building and no-one was injured. Unfortunately they were picked up as they made their way home and for some reason admitted their actions.



"Squatter terror hits other cities"¹⁴

¹²"WIJ HOEVEN GEEN VIJFENDERTIG WC'S Streng huisregels in gekraakt Poortgebouw". *"Het vrije volk : democratisch-socialistisch dagblad"*. Rotterdam, 17-12-1980. Geraadpleegd op 17-01-2016, <http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010960741:mpeg21:a0209>

¹³"Politie R'dam haak illegale zender uit kraakpand". *"Nederlands dagblad : gereformeerd gezinsblad / hoofdred. P. Jongeling ... [et al.]"* 3-03-1982 <http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010627705:mpeg21:a0076>

¹⁴"Krakersterreur sloeg over naar andere steden Van een onze verslaggevers ROTTERDAM/NIJMEGEN, donderdag". *"De Telegraaf"*. Amsterdam, 14-10-1982. <http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:110608493:mpeg21:a0552>

... and a kids nursery (Tettertjes). There is also a gay club in the basement called de Trut ('the bitch') which started off as a squatter dance party called Flux and then evolved over time into a 'non-commercial faggotdisco.' It's been housed at Tetterode since 1985 and uses any profits to fund organisations which work on gay rights and/or HIV awareness.¹⁰ So there are great activities going on in fact, even if they are divorced from the squatters movement (and that's also OK).

Anyway, maybe it's better to return the Poort, an example of a legalised squat which has somehow maintained a connection to its roots, despite being located in an area which was extensively redeveloped.

LEGALISED

After a few years of being squatted, the Poort was legalised. The first big struggle of the Poort (but not by any means the last!) was won in October 1982 when the city council decided to legalise the building. If you read all the newspaper articles from the time, this was clearly a big deal. The squatters had negotiated hard, refusing to leave the building for fears that they would not be able to return, and arguing that they were better placed to do the renovations themselves. A factor was the tumultuous events in Amsterdam (and occasionally in other cities like Groningen and Nijmegen), where evictions of large buildings occasionally led to big riots. It's obvious to me that a militant position gets results, but only when you have a movement behind you.



Headline reads: 'Poortgebouw squatters become renters: Rotterdam Council scared of Amsterdam style incidents.'

¹⁰ https://nl.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Trut

¹¹ "Poortgebouw-krakers worden huurder Raad Rotterdam doodsbang voor Amsterdamse toestanden". "Het vrije volk : democratisch-socialistisch dagblad". Rotterdam, 29-10-1982. <http://resolver.kb.nl/resolve?urn=ddd:010961214:mpeg21:a0200>

People living at Tetterode now have told me that they were never really political squatters but I don't believe that is true, since the place used to be known as the Rode Tetter. Probably the more political people left over time as Tetterode institutionalised and became more boring. Perhaps there was a big debate in 1989 and this is what the PVP were referencing. Certainly it's worth noting the comment in the end section of the book that "For many new inhabitants Tetterode is nothing more cheap living space in a city where rent is awfully expensive," which pretty much mirrors the PVP complaint.

This points to a more general pattern which I have observed and written about in Using Space 8⁸ in which there tends to be a split between anarchists and artists, even if some artists are very leftwing and politically grounded. This rupture is really drawn out by squatting, since anarchists fight for spaces and thus are often repressed, whereas artists tend to make deals and legalise their squats, happy to be treated as the good squatters and to supply middleclass society with crap to decorate their apartments. As you can tell, I'm more on the side of the anarchist approach, but then I think it's perfectly possible to be an engaged artist who shows solidarity to anarchist projects and of course squats don't become perfect just by being labelled anarchist. It's just irritating to see artists ending up in comfy situations without remembering the political struggles which allows them to live this way and to watch people allow themselves to be slotted into the category of the 'good squatter' by politicians or mainstream media without thinking about how others then become the 'bad squatters.'

With Tetterode, I only came to know about it when I went there to participate in a discussion about the Convention on the Use of Space⁹, an art project to create a legally practical justification for occupation. Someone from a kraakspreekuur (squatters advice hour) in Amsterdam told me they had never even been inside the building before but everyone we met was friendly and politically aware. Naturally places change over time, that's OK, and I'm happy that Tetterode has gone through a long painful process to end up a self-managed building, plus I am very respectful of the group which managed to win this building for themselves, but at the same time, the Rode Tetter seems to be no more. Perhaps it will rise again, certainly the Poort has ebbs and flows.

This is becoming a bit of an extended digression, but what the hell. Actually as I research further into Tetterode it is clear that it does still have a radical identity in some ways, even if it became cut off from the squatter movement. Perhaps this can be explained a bit by what I was saying above about generational shifts and also of course personal conflicts, which can always drive a group or a person away from a movement towards something else. In writing this, I did see that there are interesting things that have gone on or indeed still go on at Tetterode, for example there are many artists ateliers, organisations and businesses using the space. There's a theatre

⁸ Using Space 8 <https://cobblebooks.wordpress.com/2014/06/08/from-usingspace8-learning-from-the-divide-between-artistic-and-anarchist-squats-in-paris/>

⁹ ref

